

# An inspector calls – essay 14



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

How does Priestley use dialogue and stage directions to create a scenes of mystery in " An Inspector calls"? " An Inspector calls" written by - John Boynton Priestley or probably known as J. B. Priestley, who is widely regarded as one of England's greatest playwrights. J. B. Priestly was a playwright who found inspiration from his life and experiences during the world war one and two to create egocentric but ordinary characters at the same time. " An Inspector Calls" was set in 1912 shortly before the world wars and the famous titanic, which sank after being hit by an iceberg.

Many ironic references are made by Mr Birling for example Mr Birling describes the titanic as " The Titanic, she sails next week, 846 tons and very luxury and unsinkable, absolutely unsinkable", and " I say there isn't a chance of war, the worlds developing so fast it'll make war impossible". The significance of this is that maybe J. B. Priestley was trying to send a message there about the ignorance of the middle-class people at the time. The play is a three act drama, which takes place in a single night set in 1912. It is considered to a classic of the mid 20th english theatre.

J. B. Priestly really focusses on the proud typical middle-class family and their views and attitude towards society and observes the historical context of time, place and action in his structure and text. J. B. Priestly uses dialogue and stage directions many times to create a sense of mystery and a deeper understanding and insight into the text. The opening scene of the play has a great impact on the audience's overall opinion of the Birlings . The role of Mr. Birling is also important, as the head of the family, he is the key character within the play.

The staging of the opening scene is necessary as it reveals the superiority and self importance of the Birling family. The opening scene sets an impression of the Birling family that is not as it seems. The Birlings are celebrating a special occasion and are very pleased with themselves. J. B. Priestley's use of stage directions and dialogue are used to convey his concerns and ideas to the reader, which also interest the reader as well, as he builds up mystery from the abrupt interruption, to the mysterious character of the inspector. J. B.

Priestley's light changing from pink which symbolises babies and is a positive colour and like the mental state of babies, it suggest almost beyond reality and non realistic opinions and attitudes, it ironically changes when the inspector comes into a bright light, which symbolises a sense of revealing the truth and clearly showing things which couldn't be seen before. J. B. Priestly shows the inspectors authority and intimidation by a mix of clever use of stage directions and dialogue for example the change of lighting as the inspector walks in creates a shift in the atmosphere and change of emotion.

Another example is when the Birling family hear a " sharp ring" from the door bell. " Sharp ring" suggest a sense of an abrupt interruption of the Birling's celebration. This suggest an unpleasant determination in the inspectors character as the word " abrupt" suggest negative and unpleasant emotion. The timing of the inspectors arrival was very ironic as he interrupted Mr Birling's speech that he believes it is " every man for himself". When the inspector first rings the bell, J. B. Priestley uses dramatic irony Mr

Birling had just said a matter of seconds before that he " might get a knighthood if we don't get into any trouble".

This is another very significant time of entering. The inspector presents himself very focussed and doesn't let anything distract him from getting him the answers that he wants. J. B. Priestly shows this clearly in the stage directions for example the inspector often comments on things " sternly, coolly, dryly and often ignoring this". This clearly shows determination which shows mystery knows why he's so determined and why his methods are so unauthodox. J. B. Priestly's role of inspector goole, was to be intimidating, forceful and overall teach the whole Birling family a lesson about responsibility and teach them the errors of their ways.

The name " goole" which is a pun of ghoul which is an evil spirit or demon who feed on corpses suggest that the inspector is like an demon or evil spirit who has decided to teach the birlings a lesson for all the wrong doings they have done. This had a big effect on all of the characters, with them all reacting in different ways to his forceful and determined interrogation. Upon his entrance he creates ".....at once an impression of massiveness, solidity and purposefulness. The Inspector continues to create this impression as he progresses through his speeches and through his interrogation of the family.

The inspector remains confident, sturdy and composed, while the Birling family around him crumble and fall to pieces. His " solidity" is proven by the fact that he remains on task despite the numerous attempts from the Birlings to digress from the questions and points that he makes this is mysterious because this is not how a normal inspector would act while

making inquiries The inspectors character and body language show that he is quite a mystery and his a fascination to the Birling family. He speaks carefully and as the stage directions show, he has a disconcerting habit to look hard at the person he is addressing.

The mystery of the inspector is also created by Mr Birling not knowing anything about him even though he is good friends with the police force, and by the inspector being new on the force and ignoring the continuous comments by Mr Birling. The inspectors use of the photo (showing it to different members of the family separately) was very effective as it created tension and made members of the Birling family to question his unusual methods gerald - "(showing annoyance) is there any particular reason why I can't see the picture". Sheila and Mr. Birling had very different characteristics.

Sheila being a much younger person is quite impressionable, whereas Mr. Birling is strongly opinionated. Sheila's attitude and views towards the Inspector and the rest of her family, change as the Inspector goes on, on the other hand Mr. Birling refuses to take any responsibility of his actions and his opinions stay the same. J. B. Priestley shows shells anguish at her acts and her families behaviour is clear " No! Oh horrible - horrible! ". For example when she finds out that " Eva Smith" was pregnant, she begins to feel sorry for her actions.

Sheila's reactions shows that when she realises how her actions have effected Eva, she begins to show true compassion. Sheila seemed to have a deeper understanding of the inspector and the message and lesson he was

trying to show the Birling family and tried to tell the rest of the family her insight of the inspector as she could see that they were making it worse for themselves, for example, Sheila - " It means that we have no excuse now for putting on airs and that if we had any sense we won't try".

This shows mystery as the audience is somewhat confused in why she reacted so differently from the rest of her family. Sheila also tried to show her family that their actions did play a part in " Eva Smith's" death, and that what they did were wrong, for example, Sheila - " Mother, I think it was cruel and vile". Sheila also noticed that the Inspector seemed to know information beforehand " And anyhow I know already". This suggests a mysterious amount of knowledge which he couldn't of just got from her diary like he said he did.

Sheila also try to tell her family that he probably already knows " Go on mother, you might as well admit it". J. B. Priestley uses this to show the difference between the older parents and the young children and the stubbornness within the parents and their refusal to accept any responsibility of " Eva Smith's" death. In Act Three the Inspector tells the Birling family " She killed herself and died a horrible death. But each of you helped to kill her. Remember that. Never forget that". J. B.

Priestley's purpose of this speech was to tell the Birling family the main reason for his visit and the main lesson he was trying to teach them. This caused a generation conflict between Mr and Mrs. Birling and Sheila and Eric. After Gerald's analysis of these events and his unravelling of the mystery of the Inspector and came to the conclusion that the Inspector is a fraud, Eric

and Sheila are the only ones to still have true regret and shame for their actions, even if it didn't result in a death. This shows Eric and Sheila have learnt their lesson from the Inspectors visit, whereas Mr.

Birling hasn't and is not even willing to consider the fact that he has done anything wrong. I feel that J. B. Priestley is showing a message within this that the older generation in that time were very narrow-minded. Eric and Sheila do not feel they have gotten away with anything or relieved in any way, unlike Mr. Birling who is back to his extremely proud self and a pink light above his head. This all brings the reader into a state of judgement and overall analysis of all the characters which might have changed during the play.

The play finishes with a telephone call from the police saying that " A girl has just died..... after swallowing some disinfectant " and a real inspector will be on his way to question the family. This is an unexpected twist. The fake inspector was there not to question them but to punish them on a moral level and to try make them feel guilty enough to change their way of thinking and behaviour. This was accomplished with Eric and Sheila, but not with their parents. The only thing that troubled them was the risk of a public scandal.

Without the twist, it would seem that the Birling parents and Gerald would go unpunished and send a message that is ok behave and think in such a way. The main purpose of the inspector was to teach. In the context of the play he told the characters what had happened to a particular girl because they had each been guilty of selfishness. In regards to the whole society, the inspector

voiced J. B. Priestley's opinions that we cannot make any progress if we don't all work together. The events of "An inspector calls" follow on from one another smoothly and all the parts fit together.

The characters and the audience seem to move from a state of ignorance to knowledge through out the play. As the play goes on a pattern emerges and the audience begins to believe that they can predict what will happen next. Personally I think J. B. Priestley creates a sense of mystery by extremely detailed and appropriate stage directions and insightful dialogue. In my opinion, those watching or reading the play today would not gain as much from the story in regards to moral teachings because most of us have now accepted the advantages of socialism.